

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HAVANA 00722 01 OF 02 180127Z POSS DUPE
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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P R 172137Z MAR 78
FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1424
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 HAVANA 0722

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV PBOR MILI XJ ET SO CU
SUBJ: CUBAN VICE-PRESIDENT COMMENTS ON AFRICA

1. SUMMARY. CUBAN VICE-PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ LAMENTS US CRITICISM OF HAVANA'S ACTIONS IN ETHIOPIA IN LIGHT OF PURPORTED GOC COMMUNICATIONS WITH USG HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS, BUT EQUIVOCATES ON QUESTION OF CUBAN TROOP DRAWDOWN. RODRIGUEZ POINTS TO RELATIVE CUBAN MODERATION ON RHODESIA HERETOFORE, BUT RAISES SPECTER OF GREATER CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN DEFENSE OF FRONT-LINE STATES IF US AND UK ALLOW RHODESIAN "INTERNAL SOLUTION" TO TAKE EFFECT.
END SUMMARY.

2. TOM HUGHES, EX-DIRECTOR OF INR AND NOW PRESIDENT OF CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT, HELD TWO HOUR CONVERSATION, MARCH 16, WITH CUBAN VICE-PRESIDENT AND FOREIGN POLIK KINGPIN CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ. HUGHES WILL REPORT ON HIS CONVERSATION IN GREATER DETAIL UPON RETURN TO WASHINGTON, BUT FOLLOWING ASPECTS (WHICH HE RECOUNTED TO US) MAY BE OF IMMEDIATE
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INTEREST.

3. CENTRAL POINT RAISED BY RODRIGUEZ WAS HIS CONCERN THAT US HAD NOT GIVEN CUBAN CREDIT FOR WHAT HAVANA THOUGHT TO BE ITS ESSECNentially RESTRAINED ROLE IN AFRICA. REPEATING POINT HE HAS PREVIOUSLY MADE TO USINT CHIEF, RODRIGUEZ STATED THAT CUBA IS CONSTANTLY TURNING ODWN REQUESTS FOR

ASSITANCE FROM VARIOUS AFRICAN HEADS OF STATE. HE ALSO LAMENTED THAT ALTHOUGH GOC HAD COMMUNICATED TO USINT CHIEF THE FACT THAT WHITE HOUSE-RELEASED MAP SHOWING NUMBER OF CUBANS IN AFRICA WAS INACCURATE AND EXAGGERATED (SEE 77 HAVANA 643 A NOVEMBER 18 CONVERSATION IN WHICH RODRIGUEZ ALSO SAID CUBA HAD NO INTENTION TO SEND COMBATANTS TO ETHIOPIA USG HAS APPARENTLY TAKEN NO ACCOUNT OF THIS RECTIFICATION.

4. FURTHERMORE, SPECIFICALLY WITH REGARD TO ETHIOPIAN CRISIS, RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT CUBA HAD TRIED TO KEEP US HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS INFORMED EVERY STEP OF THE WAY REGARDING ITS INTENTIONS. FOR THIS REASON, CUBAN LEADERSHIP HAD BEEN UPSET WHEN WHITE HOUSE HAD MENTIONED RECEIPT OF ASSURANCES REGARDING NO BORDER CROSSING FROM SOVIET UNION AND ETHIOPIA, BUT HAD FAILED TO MENTION CUBA. WHEN ASKED BY HUGHES HOW THESE COMMUNICATIONS WERE PASSED TO WASHINGTON HIGH LEVELS, RODRIGUEZ SAID, AS EXAMPLE THAT A HIGH US PERSONAGE HAD RECENTLY SAT IN VERY SEAT THAT HUGHES OCCUPIED AND WAS GIVEN ACCOUNTING OF GOC PLANS. (COMMENT: CONTEST OF CONVERSATION, HUGHES SAID, MADE IT CLEAR THAT RODRIGUEZ WAS NOT REFERRING TO USINT CHEIF. THE ONLY RECENT VISITOR WE CAN THINK OF THAT MIGHT BE THOUGHT OF BY CUBANS AS WHITE HOUSE LINK IS CALIFORNIA BANKER CHARLES MANALT, WHO WE UNDERSTAND IS ABOUT TO BE NAMED CHAIRMAN OF FINANCE COMMITTEE OF DEMOCRATIC PARTY. WE ARE NOT CERTAIN, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD SOLO MEETING WITH RODRIGUEZ. WE NOTE WITH SOME CONCERN THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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GOC OFFICIALS ATTRIBUTE PERHAPS GREATER INFLUENCE AND POWERS OF COMMUNICATION THAN WARRANTED TO VISITORS WHOM THEY CONSIDER TO BE WASHINGTON "INSIDERS" - FOR EXAMPLE, BILL MOYERS, SHIRLEY MCLAINE, AND HUGHES HIMSELF. ANY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS ON ISSUE OF PURPORTED EXTRA-OFFICIAL CUBAN COMMUNICATIONS WITH USG HIGH LEVELS WOULD BE WELCOME.)

5. ON ISSUE OF CUBAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM ETHIOPIA, IN SEEMING CONTRAST WITH HIS OWN FEBRUARY INTIMATIONS TO EAST-WEST TRADE COUNCIL AND USINT CHIEF (SEE HAVANA 462), RODRIGUEZ EQUIVOCATED ON WHETHER CUBANS WOULD REDUCE THEIR FORCES NOW THAT OGADEN CONTEST IS OVER. ACCORDING TO HUGHES, RODRIGUEZ COULD NOT BE DRAWN OUT ON CUBAN INTENTIONS REGARDING TROOP PRESENCE. (COMMENT: IN MARCH 15 BARAGUA SPEECH -SEE SEPTTEL - FIDEL CASTRO, IN LIKE MANNER, WAS VERY GUARDED ON CUBAN FORCE DEPLOYMENT INTENTIONS - THOUGH HE DID APPEAR TO SIGNAL THAT CUBAN INFANTRY PRESENCE IS DISPENSABLE.)

6. RODRIGUEZ REAFFIRMED CUBAN DESIRE TO SETTLE ERITREAN PROBLEM ON POLITICAL BASIS AND SAID THAT PLANS ARE BEING DEVELOPED (HE DID NOT MAKE CLEAR WHETHER IN HAVANA OR ADDIS) TO

ACCOMPLISH SUCH A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. WHEN QUESTIONED ON CUBAN TROOP PRESENCE IN ERITREA, RODRIGUEZ ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE WAS SOME PRESSURE ON CUBANS TO BECOME MILITARILY INVOLVED, BUT HE DID NOT FURTHER ELABORATE POINT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 HAVANA 0722

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7. IN RESPONSE TO HUGHES' QUESTION AS TO WHETHER CUBANS DID NOT FIND IT UNCOMFORTABLE TO COOPERATE WITH TERROR-BASED ADDIS REGIME WHICH IS SEEKING TO MAINTAIN EMPIRE, RODRIGUEZ REPLIED THAT THESE QUESTIONS HAD CAUSED CUBANS SOME PAUSE, BUT THAT THEY THOUGHT OAU MEMBERS' INSISTENCE ON MAINTENANCE OF STABLE BORDERS PROVIDED AMPLE JUSTIFICATION FOR ASSISTING ETHIOPIA. RODRIGUEZ ALSO ADDED, IN POSSIBLE SUGGESTION OF SOME EXASPERATION WITH ETHIOPIANS, THAT CUBANS HAD WANTED TO ANNOUNCE PUBLICLY WHEN THEIR TANK DRIVERS ENTERED ACTION, BUT THAT ETHIOPIANS INSISTED ON "TAKING ALL OF CREDIT" BY DEMANDING SECRECY. (COMMENT: CASTRO'S MARCH 15 BARAGUA SPEECH ALSO STATES THAT, WHEN ETHIOPIANS WANTED TO MAINTAIN "DISCRETION", CUBANS COULD NOT OPENLY ADMIT THEIR INVOLVEMENT.)

8. TURNING TO RHODESIA, RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT CUBANS HAVE TURNED DOWN REQUESTS FOR MILITARY HELP FROM THREE FRONT-LINE PRESIDENTS. (COMMENT: WE PRESUME THAT HE MUST BE REFERRING TO SAMORA MACHEL AND KAUNDA, AND POSSIBLY KHAMA.)
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HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT PRESSURE IS GROWING (HE DID NOT SAY FROM WHERE) TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR PATRIOTIC FRONT FROM CUBAN FACILITIES IN ANGOLA. (COMMENT: APPARENTLY, RODRIGUEZ DID NOT OWN UP TO CUBAN PRESENCE WITH ZAPU IN ZAMBIA.) IN ADDITION, HE SAID, IF US AND UK DO NOT BLOCK SMITH'S "INTERNAL SETTLEMENT," THERE WILL BE GREAT PRESSURE ON CUBA TO PROVIDE MILITARY HELP TO DEFEND FRONT-LINE STATES.

9. COMMENT: RODRIGUEZ' CLAIMS OF CUBAN RESTRAINT AND WASHINGTON MISINTERPRETATIONS THEREOF ARE OBVIOUSLY SELF-SERVING. NONETHELESS, AT LEAST SOME ELEMENTS OF CUBAN LEADERSHIP APPARENTLY DESIRE EITHER TO LIMIT OR TO DOWNPLAY DAMAGE CAUSED TO US-CUBAN NORMALIZATION PROCESS BY HAVANA'S AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT. RODRIGUEZ' CAUTION ON FUTURE CUBAN TROOP DRAWDOWN PLANS IN ETHIOPIA AND HIS SUGGESTIONS OF PRESSURES ON GOC TO BECOME MORE MILITARILY INVOLVED IN ERITREA AND RHODESIAN FRONT-LINE, HOWEVER, REVEAL A HEALTHY RESPECT ON HIS PART FOR INTERVENTIONIST INCLINATIONS ON PART OF CASTRO BROTHERS AND OTHER SIERRA COMBATANTS IN LEADERSHIP. WHETHER RODRIGUEZ HAS PERSONAL RESERVATIONS ABOUT THIS INTERVENTIONIST COURSE, AND WHETHER HIS EARLIER INTIMATIONS ABOUT ETHIOPIAN TROOP DRAWDOWNS FLOW FROM SOVIET SUGGESTIONS (GIVEN HIS ROLE AS MOST PROMINENT MOSCOW-LINE COMMUNIST IN LEADERSHIP), ARE UNCERTAIN. NONETHELESS, WE VIEW HIS CAUTIOUS TONE ON TROOP DRAWDOWNS AS INDICATIVE THAT QUESTION IS BY NO MEANS DECIDED HERE.

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